

Ry Cooder and Corridos Famosos Live in San Francisco

by Peter Stone Brown

Ry Cooder stopped touring on a regular basis several years ago, but every so often he likes to play at one of the best venues in the country, The Great American Music Hall in San Francisco. I was lucky enough to see him there five years ago with Nick Lowe.

This is Cooder's second live album. The first one, *Show Time* was recorded at the same venue 36 years ago, and on this new release he is joined by two musicians who appeared on that album, singer Terry Evans and the amazing Tejano accordion player, Flaco Jiménez.

Asides from being one of the greatest slide guitarists and finger pickers in the world, Cooder is one of the great chroniclers and archivists of American traditional and popular music. He has consistently in his 40 plus years of recording, and has brought seemingly disparate conglomerations of musicians together with brilliant results. This new album recorded in 2011 over two nights at the end of the summer is no exception.

Backed by Corridos Famosos, which includes Jiménez; singers, Terry Evans, Arnold McCuller, and Juliette Commagere; Cooder's son Joachim on drums; Robert Francis on bass and the ten-piece Mexican brass band La Banda Juvenil, the album is a totally joyous romp that is part a Cooder best of and a trip across the American landscape that combines Woody Guthrie, R&B, gospel, and Tex-Mex with one eye always on the blues.

Two songs from *Show Time*, "School Is Out" and "Dark End of the Street," are repeated, but the new versions are equally as good and actually don't beg a comparison with the old ones.

Cooder's two previous studio albums, *Pull Up Some Dust And Sit Down* and *Election Special* were pointedly political, the former including the great track, "No Banker Left Behind," and the latter released just in time for the 2012 campaign. On the new album he's slightly more subtle, but includes two original songs from "Pull Up Some Dust," "El Corrido de Jesse James," in which Jesse James looks down from heaven and sees what Wall Street bankers are up to. Jiménez weaves his accordion around Cooder's vocal and when the horn sections come in between verses, the result is somewhat astounding. The other song, "Lord Tell Me Why," sung by Terry Evans and Arnold McCuller is the funkiest song on the album and

starts with the line: "Lord tell me why a white man ain't worth nothin' in this world no more."

Two Woody Guthrie songs, long a part of Cooder's repertoire, "Do Re Mi" and "Vigilante Man" are also included. The great thing about Cooder singing Guthrie is he never imitates and knows how to make both songs now at least 70 years old totally relevant.

While the current American situation is alluded to in several songs, Cooder also knows how to have fun with "School Is Out," and a cover of Sam The Sham's "Wooly Bully." Wrapping the set up is Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene." Throughout the set Cooder plays truly impeccable guitar. No one knows how to blend genres better, and this is one of those albums that gets better each time you hear it.